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ABSTRACT

The results of a series of three studies of classroom factors influencing English oral language development in Spanish speaking bilingual elementary students are reported. Teacher control of oral language practice, extra practice in oral language encoding for bilingual students, and similarities between the English proficiency scores of children in bilingual and regular programs were investigated through observation of children in bilingual and regular classrooms. The findings supported the hypothesis that bilingual children in bilingual classrooms would not differ significantly from those in non-bilingual classrooms in regard to oral language skills. Children are learning or failing to learn the same quantity of language in all elementary programs because teachers do not direct oral encoding. Methodologies used in bilingual programs were not found to be unique to bilingual education. A need for new language teaching methods for bilingual classrooms is indicated. Sixteen learning activities are suggested as a means of promoting oral language development by intensifying language learning environments in the classroom and the home. (RW)

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THE AMERICAN CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS
FOR ORAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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by

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the three studies presented here (1978-1982) was to gain and share knowledge about oral-language development variables in American elementary school classrooms. A second goal was to gain insights into methodological-alteration possibilities which could be of help in accelerating the process of language development for bilingual students.

Bilingual students traditionally finish their elementary schooling in disproportionately large numbers behind grade level in all aspects of language measured frequently in American schools. The author's dissertation (1971), Basic Skills Differences Between Fifth Grade Anglo and Spanish-Surnamed Students in the Albuquerque Public Schools, as well as more recent publications such as Noel Epstein's 1977 Language, Ethnicity, and the Schools were strong mobiles for this research.

Many questions surface as one examines the research literature of Bilingual Education. These have to be narrowed down, honed, given parameters and converted into discreet elements in a research design. Why do students (in a given school) in bilingual classrooms do no better or worse than similar students in non-bilingual classrooms when measured in English? Should not students in "all-English" classrooms do better in English? Is the teacher teaching (controlling learning) language?

It should be noted here that the author of this study does not acquiesce to the idea that Bilingual Education is for "newcomers." "Newcomers" deserve, merit and have a right to a type of Bilingual Education (or Alternative Education) upon arrival, yes--but a very specific type which takes into account the lack of experience at the aural level

which precedes the oral level. These students are potential recruits for bilingual classrooms as they egress from their "new arrival" programs.

As Evelyn Colon La Fontaine has indicated in Bilingual Education (1978):

The future of bilingual education may well depend on how much time, energy and attention we donate to language research... and how well we use the information from this research to improve instructional approaches and strategies in the bilingual classroom.

Rudolph C. Troike also comments in Bilingual Education that: "We are coming to know a great deal more about the language learning process, both for first and second languages, and how to facilitate acquisition of communication skills. . ."

More and more we are witnessing an awareness of a need for a broader knowledge base for teachers on how spoken language is learned. It is unessential here to repeat that spoken language is a prerequisite to reading, but in the case of the bilingual student, this item is critical.

THE STUDIES

This report presents the data of the three-study series. The basic questions addressed were:

1. How much of the oral language practice (development) in the elementary schools is controlled by teachers?
2. Are bilingual students being directed in extra practice in oral (language) encoding by the teachers?
3. Why do children in bilingual programs score (in English) about as well as those not in such programs in the same schools?

The first study included observation of 41 children (one child, all day, in each case) in non-bilingual classrooms in the Fresno, California area to determine how much of their daily oral encoding was controlled or

induced by teachers and/or other adults in the elementary classrooms (pre-school through sixth grade). The range (R) was zero to seven minutes, but the median (used because of the zero bottom limit) was only 39 seconds (Md =39" out of an average ($\bar{X}$) 13,385 - second observation!

Dr. Miles V. Zintz, Professor of Education and director of the author's doctoral dissertation at the University of New Mexico, in a letter (1979) to the author, reacting to the results of that first study states:

"... I suspect that we have all known for a long time that teachers spend most of their time forbidding language instead of encouraging it--but it is a shocking reality to admit that a child might sit all day at school and average no more than 40 seconds of time using (interpreting or creating) language."

The second study, also done in Fresno, California area schools looked at 39 children with the same basic research design; however, this time only children in (K-6) bilingual classrooms were observed. The results were not significantly different, although this study rendered information about the other-than-English language (Spanish) encoding. The median, including both languages (Md_t), was only fifty-five seconds of encoding time induced or controlled by the teachers and/or other adults out of an average ($\bar{X}$) 14,938 - second observation!

Dr. James Cummins of the Modern Language Centre of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in Canada looked at the data from the first two studies and wrote the author (1982):

"... I found your data interesting (and disturbing)..."

The third study was undertaken by the author during his sabbatical leave from California State University, Fresno during the Spring semester 1982. A national sample* of 13 Spanish-English (K-6) bilingual classrooms

*See Appendices

was selected from those recommended as exemplary at each site. The hypothesis was that there would be no significant differences between the data rendered in the second study and the data to be gathered in the national bilingual sample. The hypothesis was supported in all aspects observed! The comparable figure was 30 seconds ($Md_t = 30''$) out of an average ($\bar{X}$) 10,800 - second observation! See DATA COMPARISON on page 5.

The findings support the hypothesis in that the same lack of directed oral encoding is occurring in bilingual and non-bilingual classrooms throughout the country. Children are learning (or not) the same quantity of language in all programs basically because the teachers do not control when or how oral language is learned.

The data from these studies seem to indicate a need for methodologies not presently employed in the schools of America. If the objectives of Bilingual Education include the teaching of languages, some new teaching/learning methodologies for language need to be suggested. This project did not find methodologies in bilingual program classrooms which were unique to bilingual education.

OBSERVATIONS

No uniqueness could be attached to any of the methodologies or techniques used in the classrooms observed. All methods and techniques can be found in non-bilingual programs. The language used in the methodologies was sometimes Spanish, but even this can be found in non-bilingual programs--in Mexico, for instance. It would appear that we have not designed methodologies but merely adapted very old and tried methods which were never designed for, nor successful in, teaching any spoken language.

DATA COMPARISON
FRESNO NON-BILINGUAL
(Study #1)

Class time	N = 38*	R = 125' - 333'	$\bar{X}$ = 224'	Md = 260'
Induced (Child)	N = 41*	R = 0.0' - 7'	$\bar{X}$ = 1.2'	Md = .7'
Percent Induced			0.5%	0.3%

FRESNO BILINGUAL
(Study #2)

Class time	N = 38*	R _t = 120' - 345'	$\bar{X}_t$ = 247'	Md _t = 240'
		R _s = 0.0'*** - 253'	$\bar{X}_s$ = 42'	Md _s = 20'
Percent in Spanish			17%	8%
Induced (Child)	N = 39*	R _t = 0.1 - 10'	$\bar{X}_t$ = 1.5'	Md _t = .9'
		R _s = 0.0*** - 2.5'	$\bar{X}_s$ = .4	Md _s = .04'
Percent Induced Total			0.5%	0.4%
Percent Induced in Spanish			0.1%	0.02%

NATIONAL BILINGUAL SAMPLE
(Study #3)

Class time	N = 13	R _t = 60' - 320'	$\bar{X}_t$ = 193'	Md _t = 180'
		R _s = 0.0** - 170'	$\bar{X}_s$ = 29'	Md _s = 0.0'
Percent in Spanish			15%	0.0%
Induced (Child)	N = 13	R _t = 0.0 - 9.3	$\bar{X}_t$ = 1.3'	Md _t = 0.5'
		R _s = 0.0*** - 0.5	$\bar{X}_s$ = 0.1'	Md _s = 0.07'
Percent Induced Total			0.7%	0.3%
Percent Induced in Spanish			0.1%	0.04%

N = Number

R = Range R_t = Range of total R_s = Range of Spanish

$\bar{X}$ = Mean $\bar{X}_t$ = Mean of total $\bar{X}$'s = Mean of Spanish

Md = Mode Md_t = Mode of total Md_s = Mode of Spanish

*The "N" difference is caused by poorly written reports which could not be interpreted in all the data.

**15 of 38 classes in the 2nd study, and 7 of 13 in the 3rd study did not teach in Spanish. None taught exclusively in Spanish

***18 of 39 students observed in the 2nd study and 6 of 13 in the national sample spoke no Spanish as directed by the adults.

The fact that the median time of directed encoding in the bilingual classes is minuscule compared with the length of the school day, reflects the same findings as in the non-bilingual classrooms. It seems clear, at this time, that the reflection of need for spoken-language practice is not present in the bilingual programs. The methods and techniques are basically the same in all the (96) classrooms observed and included in the three studies.

It is interesting to note how often (15 of 38 in the 2nd study and 7 of 13 in the 3rd study) teachers in bilingual classrooms taught all day in English, yet not one taught all day in Spanish or any other non-English language. One can only deduce a strong preoccupation with the teaching of English on the part of many bilingual educators today. A factor mentioned in the research points to teacher preparation in languages other-than-English as the influencing factor in this area. They speak English more fluently and, therefore, have a tendency to use it more.

Of great interest to the researcher as he looked at the national sample was the variety in OBSERVATION CLASSROOM MAKEUP.* Apparently there is an almost individual interpretation of what the bilingual-program ethnic and language makeup should be. One can find homogeneous groups of (29) Mexican-American children, all of whom are Non-English-Proficient (NEP), as well as homogeneous groups of (20) "Anglo" English monolinguals. Between these two extremes there is a third dimension in the differences. The researcher found at least one program where the teacher was an English (L_2)/Spanish (L_1) bilingual, while the aide was

*See Appendices

bilingual English (L_2)/another non-English language (L_3) and the children were all English (L_2)/yet another non-English language (L_4). For all practical purposes this classroom was 100% bilingual but English (L_2) was the only means of communication. One program, also 100% bilingual, had nine linguistic groups represented! The only rallying point here was the common bond of bilingualism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basically the data gathered suggest that teachers do not control a significant portion of the oral language development of children. They permit it by allowing talk and discussion, but they do not induce it. One can imagine a basketball coach telling the players they may practice if they feel like it! Language is a physical skill which requires constant intensive oral practice. The following is but a partial list of the many ways in which a teacher of children who need additional practice may implement and control such activity. Note that the content of the activities suggested is not altered.

I. Intensifying language learning environments in the classroom (sample activity-alteration recommendations)

"The Circus" (K-1) Psychomotor/Coordination

Create a "3 or 4-Ring Circus" where each ring has an alternating "actor" and "master." The "master" announces the action, then describes it as it happens. He then becomes the "actor" and gives his hat and baton to the next person in line. The "actor" returns to the end of the line when the "act" is completed. The teacher only prompts.

"Show and Tell" (K-2) Language Development

At the beginning, insure that everyone has an object to talk about (a supply of teacher-made situation-picture cards and/or "peep-boxes" are ready for those not bringing something from home) and that everyone has a "partner." Direct the children a few minutes to tell each other what they will say to the group, then proceed in regular manner, calling children to stand and "tell."

"Story Time" (K-3) Imitation Story Telling

Students are given the responsibility to retell stories heard from the teacher, aide, or AV program. Instead of traditional whole group, a story is told to part of the class only. Students are asked "What are you going to tell about this story?" then:

- a. Teacher and aide change places to be told the story by the opposite group.
- b. A puppet is kept "asleep" during the story and "awakened" at the end of the story so that students can tell it the story.

"Movie Time" (K-12) Imitation Composition

Questioning is done by someone who "did not see the picture." The teacher or aide prepares the group as in "Story Time," then the other group comes in and is told the "plot." The students are paired and only one from each pair views the movie. The movie is re-run as the pair sits together, but the audio is off so that the partner re-tells.

"Read and Tell" (3-12) Book Reports

Have students "paired" to hear each other's oral report, then after the writing, read the report back to the writer.

"Newscasting" (5-12) Speech

Local radio stations dispose of teletype (printout) news on a daily basis. A constant supply of readings can be picked up free daily. Students are given one or two "items" to read (in pairs) to each other. On Fridays, the students pick the "item" from the readings to record on a tape made by the whole class and to be heard by the whole class. "Best Newscaster of the Week," "Best Piece of News" contests ends each week.

"Newsriting" (5-12) Composition

Change Friday's activity from "newscasting" to writing (paraphrasing) and "publish" items once per week.

"Oral Math" (K-12) Mathematics

A student who can verbalize a problem without using words unknown to him can probably solve the problem. Thus, from Kinder, the student learns to "put groups together" (add) "take items from a group" (subtract) "Make one group from several equal groups" (multiply) and "make equal groups from a large group" (divide).

As numbers are learned and numerals come into play, $12+8 = \underline{\quad}?$ becomes: "How many will you have altogether if you put together a group of 12 and a group of 8? And later, "How much is $12 + 8$? Similarly, $12 \div 3 = \underline{\quad}?$ becomes "How many groups of 3 can you make out of 12? And later, "How much is 12 divided by 3?" or (more difficult) "How much is 3 divided into 16?" and on ($12 \times 6 = \underline{\quad}?$) to multiplication and ($17 - 4 = \underline{\quad}?$) subtraction...etc.

II. Concomitant parent-participation activities for intensifying language-learning environments in the home (activities can be in any language).

"The Circus" (K-1) Psychomotor/Coordinator

Parents are given a list of the activities in the "rings" and they ask the children to give them the directions they gave at each position as they return home.

"Show and Tell" (K-2) Language Development

Children take home their "Show and Tell" item and the parents ask them what they said about it daily.

"Story Time" (K-3) Imitation Story Telling

Parents are given a list with dates and titles of stories which their children will be asked to re-tell. Parents ask the child to tell them the specific story for that day when they return home.

"Movie Time" (K-12) Imitation Composition

Same as "Story Time"

"Read and Tell" (3-12) Book Reports

Parents know when reports are due and ask the students to tell them to them or to read the reports to them.

"News Casting" (5-12) Speech

Students take home the daily news teletypes and parents ask to hear them read.

"News writing" (5-12) Composition

Fridays parents ask students to read their papers to them.

"Oral Math" (K-6) Mathematics

Parents are given the activities and it is suggested to them how they can use household items to have the children verbalize their learning (lower grades only).

DIRECTIONS TO OBSERVERS

The directions followed were the same in the three studies.

1. Be at the site all day.
2. Record the number of minutes the students are under the supervision of the teacher, (classroom time). Note if the time is in Spanish or English.
3. Choose a child at random to observe, (the teacher should not know which child you choose.) Pick a seat before children arrive if possible. Then observe the child that uses it.
4. Observe the child only when under the direction (direct or indirect) of his teacher or any adult in charge of him or her. Include when he or she is "sent" or ordered to do something which requires verbalization.
5. Time all instances when the child transmits information orally under teacher or adult direction:

Samples:

- a. Relays or conveys a message.
- b. Answers or asks a question.

Do not time instances when reception (comprehension) is not required or when the student is not directed by the teacher:

Samples:

- a. Reading aloud.
- b. Singing
- c. Talk with other students not directed by the teacher.

Write a report which gives the grade level observed, the school and a candid set of notes based on your observation, including the total "transmission time" and total "class time."

Directed Oral Encoding Information

Date _____

Observer: Name _____

Affiliation _____

School: Name _____

Principal's Name _____

Address _____

Grades _____

Bilingual Program? Yes ☐ No ☐

Classroom: Teacher Bilingual? Yes ☐ No ☐ Name: _____

Ethnicity _____

Grade: _____

Ethnic Makeup of Class # _____ Eth _____,

_____ Eth _____, # _____ Eth _____, # _____ Eth _____

Adults (# & Ethnicity) _____

Subject Observed:

Sex _____ Name _____

Bilingual ☐ Mono Eng ☐ First Only ☐
Mono Other ☐

Ethnicity _____ What _____

Total Time _____ Seconds + _____ Seconds
English Spanish

Total Induced _____ Seconds + _____ Seconds
English Spanish

Third Study
OBSERVATION SITES

2	Arizona	Tucson	Hollinger Elementary
1	California	Los Angeles	Riggin Elementary
1		San José	H. Cureton Elementary
2		San Ysidro	Willow Elementary
1	Michigan	Detroit	Bennett Elementary
2	New Mexico	Albuquerque	Dennis Chávez Elementary
1		Albuquerque	Emmerson Elementary
1		Santo Domingo	Santo Domingo Elementary
2	New York	New York	P. S. 28 [Wright Bros.]

13	5 States	8 Cities	9 Schools
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GRADES OBSERVED

1st Study

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Number</u>
PS	1
K	9
1	11
2	7
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	1
41 - Total	

2nd Study

<u>Number</u>	
0	
9	
8	
7	
6	
4	
5	
3	
42 - Total	

3rd Study

<u>Number</u>	
0	
3	
1 (1-2 comb)	
2	
3 (Inc. a 2, 3, 4 Comb.)	
1	
2	
1	
13 - Total	

Third Study
OBSERVATION CLASSROOM MAKEUP

29 Mexican - American (N.E.P.)

28 Mexican - American

27 Mexican - American, 1 "Anglo. . ."

26 Mexican - American, 5 "Anglo. . ."

25 Mexican - American (2 NEP, 23 L.E.P.)

17 Mexican - American

29 Dom., 2 P.R., 1 Cuban, 1 Nica., 1 Haiti

18 Dom., 8 P.R., 1 Guat., 1 Nica., 1 Colom.

11 Sto. Dom. Pueblo, 9 San Felipe Pueblo (Keres)

2 Mex. - Americans, 6 Jordan, 6 Palestinian

4 "Anglo. . .", 3 Viet., 4 Black, 4 Laos, 2 Camb.

3 Mex. - Am., 1 Navajo, 1 Pueblo, 1 Apache

14 "Anglo. . .", 9 Mexican-American

20 "Anglo. . ."